



6 Kinship Care

Successful family engagement, one of our foremost goals in this plan, involves identifying, recruiting, and supporting kin to step forward and become caregivers and develop, maintain or enhance their relationship with the identified children. An essential step toward achieving permanency for children is to preserve connections they have with relatives and kin. Our outcome is that every child have supportive kin in their lives. Supporting these kin to take up their role in the life of the child is the goal. Enhancing relative placements and access to services for kinship providers will be integral to achieving this goal. In addition, some of the major strategies we will employ to meet our outcome and goal are:

- Conducting comprehensive searches for kin, early and often. Once we identify kin, Tribal affiliations and communities, we will invite them to the table to become decision-makers and solution partners in planning for the child, particularly in planning for permanence in the child's life (using Family Team Decision-Making meetings and Family Group Conferences). Where appropriate, kin providers will be encouraged and supported to be full-time caregivers for children; however, if that is not possible, support will be provided to kin to maintain their ties to the child through visitation and other means;
- Providing support through training stipends when kin care providers seek to be licensed to provide care for children. This will allow kin providers to access the training resource parents currently receive, with financial support;
- Clarification of the process to establish guardianships for kin who will or wish to make a legal commitment to care for children. Guardianships are part of our vision of the array of options we must build into the system to provide permanence for children in our custody. Guardianship changes anticipate the shift of custody from the state to the kin provider; and
- Establishment of post-guardianship support and information resource centers to provide a place for kin providers to get assistance with needs related to the child, or with the establishment of the guardianship itself. We anticipate this to include assistance with financial, legal, medical, and other service referral needs.

Our partnership with kin and family members is focused on achieving the best permanency outcome for the child. Involvement and engagement of families in building this plan for a child is not only the best practice outcome, it is central to our value of maintaining contact and preserving relationships between parents, kin and children.